

## Let's Talk About...

# Helping Your Preschooler (3 to 5 years) Cope with Being in the Hospital

Preschoolers learn about the world through play and exploring their environment. They are busy, curious, and becoming more independent. The hospital can seem scary to preschoolers because of their strong imaginations, lack of understanding, and limited opportunities to explore and move around in the ways they're used to. You can improve your preschooler's experience by using some of the tips in this handout and by talking with your healthcare team about the best ways to speak with and support your child.

### What are common reasons preschoolers feel stress in the hospital?

The hospital can be an unfamiliar place that's outside your preschooler's comfort zone. A stay in the hospital may involve:

- Separation from parents and family
- Changes in routine (like sleep and eating patterns)
- Loss of control and independence
- Fear of the unknown, new people, and medical procedures that can be misunderstood as punishment
- Difficulty separating make-believe from reality
- Interpreting words and phrases literally (thinking a cat is at a CAT scan)
- Limited concept of time
- Fewer opportunities for socialization and play



### What are signs your preschooler could be under stress?

Watch for clues, such as:

- Excessive fear
- Crying
- Increase in anger and frustration
- Regression (not using skills they have already learned)
- Seeking more comfort from parents or family
- Increase in number of tantrums
- Changes to eating and sleeping patterns
- Less interest in normal activities
- Coming up with their own explanations as to why things are happening
- Seeking out other ways to find choice and control (such as refusing to take medications)



## How can you support your preschooler?

You can help your preschooler lower their stress levels and feel more comfortable by:

- Giving them one-on-one attention
- Offering choices when possible
- Allowing them to play and socialize when possible
- Giving simple, honest explanations
- Keeping a daily routine when possible
- Reinforcing that hospitalization is not their fault and that treatment is not punishment
- Setting limits and providing structure
- Providing step-by-step preparation for hospital experiences
- Allowing them to safely explore their environment
- Giving them jobs to do, especially during procedures (holding someone's hand, looking at a book)
- Correcting any misconceptions
- Giving them praise ("You're doing a great job holding still" or "You are taking nice deep breaths")
- Allowing them to show their creations or accomplishments to others
- Describing time in a way they can understand (the length of a favorite T.V. show or song)

## How can you help comfort your preschooler?

If you sense your preschooler is under stress, you can try:

- Being present with your child as often as possible
- Limiting the number of people in their hospital room
- Bringing comfort items from home
- Giving them a safe environment to play and express themselves
- Giving simple and honest explanations when they have a question
- Validating their feelings
- Holding their hand or letting them sit on your lap
- Reading to them
- Being involved in their care when possible

### Questions for my healthcare team

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

Intermountain Healthcare complies with applicable federal civil rights laws and does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, age, disability, or sex. Se proveen servicios de interpretación gratis. Hable con un empleado para solicitarlo. 我們將根據您的需求提供免費的口譯服務。請找尋工作人員協助